



**BIRDING
AFRICA**
THE AFRICA SPECIALISTS

Upper Guinea Special

2024 Tour Leaflet



Rufous Fishing Owl © Tertius Gous

16 – 31 January 2024

Upper Guinea Special 2024



SPECIALS IN COMFORT

- Numerous Upper Guinea Specials: Black-headed Rufous Warbler, Yellow-bearded Greenbul, Rufous Fishing Owl, Emerald Starling, Gola Malimbe
- Easy access to Sierra Leone Prinia
- No camping required

Emerald Starling © Tertius Gous



TOUR LEADER: MICHAEL MILLS



Michael’s incredible focus, dedication and ability to locate and show Africa’s toughest birds is probably unequalled. He has led dozens of tours across the continent and his experience in locating birds on just the softest of calls or briefest of views impresses those who travelled with him.

DATES

2024	16 – 31 Jan
2025	4 – 19 Feb
2027	12 – 27 Jan

PROVISIONAL PRICES 2024

Tour (sharing)	\$5990
Single supplement	\$490
*sharing only possible if a bed is shared	

BOOK ONLINE

Visit www.birdingafrica.com
Deposit (\$150) by credit card
Email info@birdingafrica.com



Black-headed Rufous Warbler © Tertius Gous

Our Upper Guinea Special tour is one of several African tours that we have pioneered, and puts the comfort back into birding this little-known region. Gone are the tough hikes and rough camping required on other tours to Sierra Leone, without compromising on the birds.

Our tour, uniquely, combines the best of Liberia and Sierra Leone, in reasonable comfort. Sturdy 4x4s are used throughout and all nights are accommodated in hotels or guest houses, with no camping required.

In Liberia our entire focus will be on the rich forests of the Mount Nimba area. Highlights here may include Sierra Leone Prinia, Black-headed Rufous Warbler, Nimba Flycatcher, Gola Malimbe and Yellow-bearded Greenbul, among many other forest species.

This is complemented by our abbreviated Sierra Leone tour that cuts out all camping and tough hikes. Birding in Sierra Leone will be more mixed, with gallery habitats accessed at Tiwai Island, lowland rainforest at Tiwai and Gola, and moist savanna at Bumbuna. Top birds we will be searching for include Rufous Fishing Owl, White-crested Tiger Heron, African Pitta, Yellow-

headed Picathartes, Emerald Starling, Crimson Seedcracker, Turati’s Boubou and Togo Paradise Whydah.

TOUR FOCUS

This tour will provide a good chance to see most of the Upper Guinea forest specials. It is heavily bird-focused although we may see several species of monkey and squirrel.

A bird species list will be handed out to you as part of your tour booklet at the start of the tour and is available beforehand upon request.

The tour coincides with the main dry season, when getting around is easier. Many birds will be breeding or just have finished breeding during our visit.

Days will typically be warm and humid, although more pleasant at Mount Nimba. We are unlikely to encounter any rain.

Travel conditions are generally reasonable (we avoid long drives on bad roads), although service at hotels is often slow and water/electricity supply unreliable. You’ll still be in West Africa!



Nkulengu Rail © Michael Mills

ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

Accommodation is fairly basic, but generally comfortable; no camping is required! At Tiwai participants may have to share rooms (depends on group size) and all rooms have shared (within the group) ablutions. At Gola East (Lalehun) ablutions are also shared. Running water is not always available and electricity often unreliable.

Meals are generally simple. Most lunches will be taken in the field.

Water is not safe to drink so we supply free bottled water in the vehicle that you can take to your rooms for drinking and brushing teeth. Beers and soft drinks are widely available.

WALKING

This tour requires only a moderate degree of fitness. Most walks will last less than five hours and be conducted at a manageable pace. Terrain where

we walk is generally flat, except at Mount Nimba where it is quite rocky on top. Some river crossings may be made on basic, local bridges or by wading through shallow water.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Participants are required to make their own international flight reservations.

The tour starts with dinner and accommodation in Monrovia on 16 January 2024 and ends at Lungi International Airport near Freetoen, Sierra Leone, on the afternoon of 31 January (excluding dinner and accommodation).

Participants can depart any time after 16h00 on the day that the tour ends.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum 9 participants in three 4x4s.

INTRODUCTION

The Upper Guinea region holds the westernmost extent of Africa's lowland rainforests, separated from the main Congo Basin forests by the Dahomey gap. These forests stretch from central Ghana west across southern Ivory Coast and Liberia to eastern Sierra Leone. They are home to more than fifteen bird endemics, namely White-breasted Guineafowl, Rufous Fishing Owl, Brown-cheeked Hornbill, Timneh Parrot, Rufous-bellied Wattle-eye, Western Wattled Cuckooshrike, Green-tailed Bristlebill, Yellow-bearded Greenbul, Little Green Woodpecker, Rufous-winged Illadopsis, Yellow-headed Picathartes, Sierra Leone Prinia, Red-fronted Antpecker, Sharpe's Apalis, Black-headed Rufous Warbler, Nimba Flycatcher, Crimson Seedcracker, Gola Malimbe and Copper-tailed Starling.

Another suite of forest species are confined to a slightly wider zone, from far western Cameroon to Gambia, including Red-billed Helmetshrike, Buff-throated Sunbird, Melancholy Woodpecker, Fire-bellied Woodpecker, Kemp's Longbill, Ahanta Francolin, Yellow-casqued Hornbill, Western Piping Hornbill, Western Pied Hornbill, Western White-crested Hornbill, Blue-moustached Bee-eater, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, Western Yellow-billed Barbet, West African Wattle-eye, Fanti Drongo, Grey-headed Bristlebill, Baumann's Olive Greenbul, Fanti Saw-wing, Grey-hooded Capuchin Babbler, Yellow-chinned Sunbird, Chestnut-and-

black Weaver, Olive-naped Weaver and Red-vented Malimbe.

In recent times Ghana has become the country most people visit to see these birds. However, Ivory Coast and Liberia hold the greatest number of Upper Guinea endemics (both countries hold all species), and specials such as Black-headed Rufous Warbler and Sierra Leone Prinia do not occur in Ghana.

Several birds are also mostly confined to the moist savanna and forest transition zone bordering these forests, such as Turati's Boubou and Emerald Starling, and it is these species that are the main focus of our Upper Guinea Special tour.

One of the challenges of birding the region is the generally poor infrastructure and bad roads, necessitating long drives on bumpy roads and long hikes combined with camping. We have researched and explored the area to find the most comfortable way of seeing these birds, offering a tour that brings access to the region in a significantly more comfortable way, suitable to a wider range of travellers and bird enthusiasts. Although some of the Upper Guinea endemics are very rare at sites visited (White-breasted Guineafowl, Western Wattled Cuckooshrike and Red-fronted Antpecker), we visit sites on this tour at which all Upper Guinea endemics have been found.

Congo Serpent Eagle © Michael Mills



ITINERARY AND MAP

Day 1	16 Jan 2024	Arrive in Liberia. Overnight near Monrovia.
Day 2	17 Jan 2024	Monrovia to Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 3	18 Jan 2024	Full day at Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 4	19 Jan 2024	Full day at Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 5	20 Jan 2024	Full day at Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 6	21 Jan 2024	Full day at Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 7	22 Jan 2024	Full day at Mount Nimba. Overnight at Nimba.
Day 8	23 Jan 2024	Nimba to Tiwai Island in Sierra Leone.
Day 9	24 Jan 2024	Full day at Tiwai Island. Overnight on Tiwai Island.
Day 10	25 Jan 2024	Full day at Tiwai Island. Overnight on Tiwai Island.
Day 11	26 Jan 2024	Tiwai Island to Gola North. Overnight at Lalehun.
Day 12	27 Jan 2024	Full day at Gola North. Overnight at Lalehun.
Day 13	28 Jan 2024	Full day at Gola North. Overnight at Lalehun.
Day 14	29 Jan 2024	Gola North to Bumbuna area via Kanema. Overnight at Makeni.
Day 15	30 Jan 2024	Full day in Bumbuna area. Overnight at Makeni.
Day 16	31 Jan 2024	Makeni to Lungi Airport (near Freetown). Tour ends.

Rufous-winged Illadopsis © Michael Mills



DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrive Monrovia

Welcome to Liberia, a place few other birders have been to or explored! We stay overnight on the edge of Monrovia.

Day 2: Monrovia to Mount Nimba

A new tar road leads northwards out of Monrovia and takes us almost all the way to Mount Nimba. We will make several stops along the way to look for our first specials, which could include Buff-throated Sunbird and Red-cheeked Wattle-eye. Overnight in the Mount Nimba area.

Day 3–7: Mount Nimba

Mount Nimba, sub-Saharan Africa's highest mountain west of Mount Cameroon, holds some of the richest forests on the continent. This area was the subject of an intensive ornithological study 50 years ago before iron-ore mining wrecked the top of the mountain. Mining operations ceased some time back and moved to nearby mountains, and since then the habitat on Mount Nimba has recovered somewhat and the East Nimba Nature Reserve was proclaimed to protect the habitat.

Unfortunately most of the surrounding lowland forest falls outside of the reserve and is being hacked away, and many of the early, mouth-watering finds come from these forests that are no longer pristine.

Still, Nimba offers spectacular birding with easy access to the habitats at the top of the mountain, and must rank as the place in the world requiring the least effort to see the localised Sierra Leone Prinia. Based out of our comfortable accommodation at the foot of Mount Nimba we will make daily forays to the surrounding areas in search of various special birds. Most significantly, we can drive to the top of Mount Nimba allowing easy access to the localised and rare Sierra Leone Prinia.

Here too we hope to find Long-billed Pipit, Red-tailed Leaflove, the local race of African Stonechat, Western Square-tailed Drongo and Grey-winged Robin-Chat. Lowland forest and swamps are home to Gola Malimbe, Black-headed Rufous Warbler and Western Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye. A long list of other birds will be on our radars, including Ahanta Francolin, Grey-headed Bristlebill, Square-tailed Saw-wing, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike,

Sierra Leone Prinia © Michael Mills



Gola Malimbe © Tertius Gous

Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Blue Cuckooshrike, Shining Drongo, Red-billed Helmetshrike, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher, Dusky Tit, Black-capped Apalis, Sharpe's Apalis, Golden Greenbul, Swamp Palm Bulbul, Yellow-bearded Greenbul, Kemp's Longbill, Grey Longbill, Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush, White-tailed Alethe, Forest Scrub Robin, Little Grey Flycatcher, Ussher's Flycatcher, Buff-throated Sunbird, Tiny Sunbird, Lemon-bellied Crombec, West African Batis, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Tit Hylia, Blue-moustached Bee-eater, Black Bee-eater, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Many-coloured Bushshrike, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Red-billed Helmetshrike, Little Green Woodpecker, Melancholy Woodpecker, Fire-bellied

Woodpecker, Lowland Sooty Boubou, Western Bearded Greenbul, Guinea Turaco, Black-throated Coucal, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, West African Wattle-eye, Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, and many others. We will search for Nimba Flycatcher in the mid-altitude forests.

Day 8: Nimba to Tiwai Island

Today is the longest drive of the trip, as we make our way south and west to Sierra Leone. Land border crossing formalities are straight forward and shouldn't take more than 90 minutes. From the border it is a two-hour drive to Tiwai Island. Overnight on Tiwai Island.

Days 9–10: Tiwai Island

Tiwai Island protects a stretch of primary forest surrounded by the picturesque Moa River. The river itself, accessed on canoes and a boat, is the main attraction of our visit, and two very special birds will be the focus of our time, namely Rufous Fishing Owl and White-crested Tiger Heron.

Our camp is located in a clearing in the forest, with good birding in the immediate surrounds. There are also a good number of primate species to be seen. Other bird species that we have a chance to see here include Brown Nightjar, African Pitta (at night, roosting), Spotted Honeyguide, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Rock Pratincole, Egyptian Plover, Hartlaub's Duck, White-browed Forest Flycatcher, African Finfoot, roosting Nkulengu Rail, Cassin's Flycatcher, Western White-crested Hornbill, Fanti Drongo, Maxwell's Black Weaver, White-throated Blue Swallow, Western Pied Hornbill and Fire-bellied Woodpecker. Nights on Tiwai Island.

Day 11: Tiwai Island to Gola East

After some final birding at Tiwai we make the 5-hour-long drive to Gola East. Overnight at Lalehun.

Days 12–13: Gola East

While we won't enter the remote primary forest at Gola East, a good array of birds can be found during easy walks. Birds we could find include Lagden's Bushshrike, Green-tailed Bristlebill, Western Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye, Narina Torgon, Latham's Forest Francolin, Puvel's Illadopsis, Grey-hooded Capuching Babbler, Yellow-billed Turaco, Long-tailed Hawk, Western Piping Hornbill, Brown-cheeked Hornbill, Yellow-casqued Hornbill, Timneh Parrot, Rufous-winged Illadopsis, Pale-breasted Illadopsis and Copper-tailed Starling. There is a Yellow-headed Picathartes colony an hours' walk away from our accommodation, which we will also visit during an evening, although birds

White-crested Tiger Heron © Tertius Gous



Emerald Starling © Tertius Gous

are not as habituated as they are in Ghana, so often don't stay long. Overnight at Lalehun.

Day 14: Gola East to Bumbuna area

Today we drive west to Bumbuna, breaking the journey in Kanema where we will look for Forbes's Plover in some rice fields. Black-backed Cisticola occurs nearby. Night in Makeni town.

Day 15: Bumbuna area

With all the forest birding done over the past days, some easy, open country birding will be welcome. The Bumbuna area is famous for being one of the most accessible sites where the localised Emerald Starling can be found, and finding some of these beautiful birds will be a major target of our time

here. Turati's Boubou, Togo Paradise Whydah, Cameroon Indigobird, Jambandu Indigobird and Baumann's Olive Greenbul will be other major targets of our visit, found alongside a wide range of moist savanna birds such as Senegal Eremomela, Moustached Grass Warbler, Senegal Batis, Yellow-winged Pytilia, African Firefinch, Red-headed Quelea and Grasshopper Buzzard. Night in Makeni.

Day 16: Makeni to Lungi near Freetown

After some final birding near Makeni, where we stand a chance for Black-backed Cisticola and Black-faced Quailfinch, we make the shortish drive to Lungi, near Freetown, planning to arrive in the early afternoon. The tour ends on arrival at Lungi International Airport.

INCLUDED

- Expert Birding Africa tour leader
- Entry fees and activities as per itinerary
- Accommodation throughout (no camping)
- Airport transfers on arrival/departure
- Bottled water in the vehicle
- One soft drink at each sit-down meal
- General tips

QUESTIONS?

Please email the office, info@birdingafrica.com, to reserve a place or ask questions (you can also cc michael@birdingafrica.com and callan@birdingafrica.com who are both involved in the planning of this tour.

BOOKLET AND CHECKLIST

Birding Africa provides:

1. this tour leaflet with detailed itinerary
2. the tour information pack, emailed to you
3. the tour booklet with checklists, on the tour

HOW TO BOOK

1. Complete our easy online booking form.
2. Secure your booking deposit by credit card on our 3D secure online payment site (\$150).
3. Settle the balance by bank transfer 150 days before the tour. We will email you a reminder and the banking details.

